## United States History

**Primary Sources on Black Power**

## SOURCE A: John Lewis, “Patience is a Dirty and Nasty Word,” March on Washington, 1963

The revolution is at hand, and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery. The nonviolent revolution is saying, "We will not wait for the courts to act, for we have been waiting for hundreds of years. We will not wait for the President, the Justice Department, nor Congress, but we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory."

To those who have said, "Be patient and wait," we must say that "patience" is a dirty and nasty word. We cannot be patient, we do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom, and we want it *now*. We cannot depend on any political party, for both the Democrats and the Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence.

**SOURCE B: “The Ballot or the Bullet,” by Malcolm X, 1964 (Cleveland, Ohio)**If we don't do something real soon, I think you'll have to agree that we're going to be forced either to use the ballot or the bullet. It's one or the other in 1964. It isn't that time is running out -- time has run out!

1964 threatens to be the most explosive year America has ever witnessed. The most explosive year. Why? It's also a political year. It's the year when all of the white politicians will be back in the so-called Negro community jiving you and me for some votes. The year when all of the white political crooks will be right back in your and my community with their false promises, building up our hopes for a letdown, with their trickery and their treachery, with their false promises which they don't intend to keep.

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver -- no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.

And now you're facing a situation where the young Negro's coming up. They don't want to hear that "turn the-other-cheek" stuff, no.

**SOURCE C: The Chicago Freedom Movement, 1966**

...Chicago today is a divided city -- segregated in all areas of social and economic activity, in employment, in education, in housing and in community organization. The Negro community is sectioned off from the larger metropolis into areas of the city that have been set aside for black ghettoes.

Under the system of northern racism the Negro receives inferior and second-class status in every area of urban living. The Negro is concentrated in the low-paying and second-rate jobs. In housing, proportionately more Negroes live in substandard or deteriorating dwellings. In education, Negro schools have more inexperienced teachers, fewer classrooms, and less expenditures per pupil. In the maintenance of law and order Negroes are frequently the victims of police brutality and of stop and search methods of crime detection.

**SOURCE D: Black Panther Party Platform and Program, 1966**

1. *We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.*
2. *We want full employment for our people.*
3. *We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community.*
4. *We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.*
5. *We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.*
6. *We want all black men to be exempt from military service.*
7. *We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.*
8. *We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.*
9. *We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.*

## SOURCE E: Commencement Address at Howard University, June 4, 1965

But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result. For the task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities--physical, mental and spiritual, and to pursue their individual happiness.

## SOURCE F: Requiem for Nonviolence, Eldridge Cleaver, 1968

The murder of Dr. Martin Luther King came as a surprise–and surprisingly it also came as a shock. Many people, particularly those in the black community who long ago abandoned nonviolence and opted to implement the slogan of Malcolm X–"black liberation by any means necessary"–have been expecting to hear of Dr. King's death for a long time. Many even became tired of waiting. But that Dr. King would have to die was a certainty.

The assassin's bullet not only killed Dr. King, it killed a period of history. **It** killed a hope, and it killed a dream. That white America could produce the assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King is looked upon by black people–and not just those identified as black militants–as a final repudiation by white America of any hope of reconciliation, of any hope of change by peaceful and nonviolent means. So that it becomes clear that the only way for black people in this country to get the things that they want–and the things that they have a right to and that they deserve–is to meet fire with fire.

**SOURCE G: Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, from *Black Power* (1967)**

The advocates of Black Power reject the old slogans and meaningless rhetoric of previous years in the civil rights struggle. Each time the black people in those cities saw Dr. Martin Luther King get slapped they became angry. When they saw little black girls bombed to death in a church and civil rights workers ambushed and murdered, they were angrier; and when nothing happened, they were steaming mad. We had nothing to offer that they could see, except to go out and be beaten again.

The very notion [that nonviolence will lead to rights] is absurd. . . . There are many who still sincerely believe in that approach. From our viewpoint, rampaging white mobs and white night-riders must be made to understand that their days of free head-whipping are over. Black people should and must fight back. Nothing more quickly repels someone bent on destroying you than the unequivocal message: "O.K., fool, make your move, and run the same risk I run-of dying."

While color blindness may be a sound goal ultimately, we must realize that race is an overwhelming fact of life in this historical period. There is no black man in the country who can live "simply as a man." His blackness is an ever-present fact of this racist society, whether he recognizes it or not. It is unlikely that this or the next generation will witness the time when race will no longer be relevant in the conduct of public affairs and in public policy decision-making. . . .

**SOURCE H: James Forman's Black Manifesto, 1969**

We are therefore demanding of the white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues which are part and parcel of the system of capitalism, that they begin to pay reparations to black people in this country. We are demanding $500,000,000 from the Christian white churches and the Jewish synagogues. . . . Our objective in issuing this Manifesto is to force the racist white Christian church to begin the payment of reparations which are due to all black people, not only by the church but also by private business and the U.S. government. We see this focus on the Christian church as an effort around which all black people can unite.